

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 ATHENS 07907 020620Z

43

ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 7907

E.O. 11562: GDS

TAGS HPINT, GR

SUBJECT: ELECTION ESTIMATES

1. AS ELECTION CAMPAIGN ACCELERATES, RELUCTANCE TO FORECAST RESULTS BECOMES MORE AMRKED EXCEPT AMONG THOSE IN CARETAKE GOVERNEMTN AND STAUNCH CARAMANLIS SUPPORTERS WHO ANTICIPATE SUBSTANTIAL VICTORY. THIS IS CASE BOTH AMONG PARTY STALWARTS AND KNOWLEDGEABLE POLITICAL COMMENTATORS. SUCH INDIVIDUALS ASSERT THAT IT WOULD BE UNREALISTIC TO HAZARD ANY REASONABLY HARD PERCENTAGE ESTIMATES UNTIL FINAL STAGE OF SO FAR GENERALIZED CAMPAIGNING. BY THEN, ARGUMENT RUNS, INFIGHTING AMONG PERTIES WILL IDENTIFY AND SHARPEN SPECIFIC ISSUES SO THAT PRESS AND PUBLIC REACTIONS CAN BECOME MORE DIRECTLY FOCUSED. CRYSTAL BALL-GAZING IS FURTHER INHIBITED BY UNCERTAINTY CONCERNING OUTCOME OF CYPRUS SITUATION AND IMPACT ANY NEW DEVELOPMENTS PRIOR TO ELECTIONS MAY HAVE UPON ELECTORAGE. EXCEPT FOR CAMPAIGNING OF UNITED LEFT, PAPANDREOU'S PASOK AND TO LIMITED EXTENT GAROUFALIAS, ALL THREE OF WHICH ARE STILL ONLY IN TAKE-OFF STAGE, TWO MAJOR ADVERSARY PARTIES, CU/NF AND NEW DEMOCRACY, HAVE SPOKEN ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY IN GENERALITIES AND DESCRIBED SUCH BROAD OBJECTIVES AS TO OBFUSCATE INTELLIGENT CHOUCES BY GREEK ELECTORATE.

2. NO ONE HAS SO FAR EVEN TRIED TO MAKE ANY ASSESSMENT BASED ON PERSONAL APPEAL OF INDIVIDUAL CANDIDAATES WITHIN
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PAGE 02 ATHENS 07907 020620Z

RESPECTIVE CONSTITUENCIES. MOREOVER, FACT THAT NO

ELECTIONS HAVE TAKEN PLACE FOR MORE THAN TEN YEARS INHIBITS POSSIBILITY OF MAKING PROJECTIONS BASED ON PAST EXPERIENCE. ANY COMPREHENSIVE EFFORT NECESSARY TO SORT OUT IMPACT OF CANDIDATES AND TO MAKE NECESSARY COMPARISONS OF STRENGTH OF INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES WOULD BE PREMATURE. FORMER TENDENCY OF GREEK ELECTORATE TO PERSONALIZE CAMPAIGN SEEMS AGAIN TO BE PROMINENT FEATURE, BUT AFTER SEVEN LEAN YEARS UNDER JUNTA WHEN THERE WAS NO OPPORTUNITY FOR FORMER DEPUTIES TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR CAPACITY FOR PRODUCING RESULTS FOR LOCAL CONSTITUENTS, EXTENT TO WHICH NEW FACES WILL ATTRACT SUPPORT IS ANOTHER UNKNOWN QUANTITY. ADDITIONAL COMPLICATION IN THIS REGARD IS THAT SOME PROMINENT EX-DEPUTIES, BY REASON OF THEIR HAVING BEEN DRAWN INTO CONVERSATIONS WITH JUNTA LEADERS, WERE EXCLUDED FROM PARTY SLATES BUT ARE RUNNING AS INDEPENDENTS IN AREAS WHERE THEY HAD PREVIOUSLY ENJOYED GREAT STRENGTH AND WHERE IN PAST SOME HAVE EMERGED WITH HIGHEST NUMBER OF VOTES. IN OUR VIEW, CHOICE BETWEEN SLATES OF CU/NF AND NEW DEMOCRACY IS VERY MUCH A HOBSON'S CHOICE, WHILE FORCES OF UNITED LEFT AND PAPANDREOU ARE SO CLOSE TOGETHER ON ISSUES SUCH AS GREECE'S RELATIONSHIP TO NATO AND TO EEC THAT AGAIN VOTERS SEEM MORE LIKELY TO MAKE THEIR ULTIMATE DECISION IN TERMS OF SUCCESS OF INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES IN PUTTING THEMSELVES ACROSS.

3. SO FAR ONE PROSPECTIVELY CRITICAL ISSUE, CYPRUS, AS ALREADY REPORTED, HAS BEEN PLAYED IN LOW KEY BY LEADERS OF TWO MAJOR PARTIES, CARAMANLIS AND MAVROS, BUT IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT AS CAMPAIGN HEATS UP, DEGREE TO WHICH THEY HAVE SO FAR SUCCEEDED IN MUTING DOMESTIC ASPECTS OF DELICATE CYPRUS SITUATION IN INTEREST OF NOT IMPENDING DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS AMONG ALL ELEMENTS CONCERNED, INCLUDING THOSE OUTSIDE GREECE, MAY BE REDUCED. CHANGES IN CYPRUS SITUATION COULD MAKE THIS ELECTION ISSUE AND CONFRONT VOTERS WITH MORE OF A CHOICE.

4. BECAUSE OF ANTICIPATED EVENTUAL REFERENDUM QUESTION OF FUTURE FORM OF GREEK STATE--MONARCHY OR REPUBLIC--IS NOT A REAL ELECTION ISSUE, ALTHOUGH BOTH PASOK AND

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ATHENS 07907 020620Z

CU/NF HAVE SEEN FIT TO ANNOUNCE OPPOSITION TO RESTORATION OF MONARCHY. NEW DEMOCRACY PARTY SKIRTS ISSUE ALTOGETHER BY STATEMENT THAT ELECTORATE WILL HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE ITS INDEPENDENT CHOICE IRRESPECTIVE OF PARTY.

6. IN REVIOUS MESSAGE EMBASSY RECORDED ITS VIEWS RESPECTING UNLIKELIHOOD OF FURTHER COUP EFFORT BUT

WOULD NEVERTHELESS REMIND DEPARTMENT THAT PRUDENCE REQUIRES AT LEAST KEEPING THIS POSSIBILITY IN MIND, HOWEVER REMOTE IT MAY BE. IN EVALUATING COUP RISK ONE GOOD MEASURE IS PROBABLY EXTENT TO WHICH CRETAKES GOVERNMENT IS ABLE TO MAINTAIN CURRENT LAW AND ORDER ENVIRONMENT. SHOULD STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS REACH PROPORTION REQUIRING STRONG POLICE OR EVEN MILITARY ACTION, THIS COULD AFFECT ELECTORATE'S ATTITUDES. ALONG SIMILAR LINES, BECAUSE CURRENT CARETAKER GOVERNMENT IS OBVIOUSLY IN NO POSITION TO DEAL DECISIVELY WITH PRESSING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, ANOTHER UNSETTLING PROSPECT COULD BE GROWING RESTIVENESS IN GREEK LABOR MOVEMENT AND CRIPPLING STRIKES. POSSIBILITY OF DELIBERATE PROVOCATION FROM EXTRAXE LEFT RESULTING IN ACTS OF VIOLENCE DESIGNED TO CONFRONT GOVERNMENT WITH POTENTIALLY DAMAGING OPTIONS CAN ALSO NOT BE EXCLUDED. GIVEN SHORT TIME SPAN BETWEEN NOW AND NOVEMBER 17, HOWEVER, EMBASSY CONTINUES TO BELIEVE CHANCES REMAIN GOOD THAT PRESENT REGIME WILL FIND STIP-GAP OR AD HOC METHODS OF DEALING WITH THIS CATEGORY OF CONTINGENCY TO PREVENT THEM FROM ASSUMING SUCH CRITICAL PROPORTIONS AS TO ENCOURAGE RIGHTIST ELEMENTS THAT MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO MOUNT COUP IF THEY ESTIMATED POLITICAL CLIMATE RIPE FOR SUCH EFFORT. IN ANY EVENT, AS EMBASSY PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, INABILITY TO GOVERN EFFECTIVELY MORE THAN AMPLY ILLUSTRATED BY MILITARY REGIME AFTER NOVEMBER 25 COUP SHOULD GIVE PAUSE TO ANY THOUGHT WITHIN ARMY OF TRYING THROUGH COUP TO RESTORE SIMILAR TYPE OF REGIME. KUBISCH

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